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THE

OUTLOOK OF PRESBYTERIANISM

BY THE

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Thirteen years have passed since the consolidation of Northern Presbyterianism was effected. The great rupture of 1838 was healed at Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in 1869, and the two General Assemblies of that year ("Old School" and "New School") were blended and amalgamated as one body. What has been the issue of this act of union, so entirely without parallel in ecclesiastical history? Have the hopes thereby engendered been fulfilled? Have the apprehensions conscientiously entertained, here and there, by those who gave only a reluctant consent to what seemed inevitable, had any fulfillment? Has the endeavor "to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace" so far succeeded as to make of the twain one body, and to all intents and purposes one homogeneous Church? And what may fairly be regarded as the outlook of this widely extended organization?

By the official returns from the several Presbyteries in May, 1870, it was found that the whole number of communicants connected with the particular congregations was 446,561, that these were distributed into 4526 local churches, and that they were served by 4238 ordained ministers and 338 licensed preachers. The sum reported as contributed during the next preceding year for the support of public worship by each congregation was $6,416,165, and the amount for all other purposes of benevolence, including home, freedmen and foreign missions, church erection, ministerial education and relief, together with colportage and the publication of religious books and tracts, was $2,023,956.

The union and the consolidation thus effected were hailed everywhere with grateful recognition of the divine Hand in bringing about the result. It had long been demanded by the people. They entered into the arrangement with their whole heart. Some few doubted—in the interest, as they affirmed, of sound doctrine. But even these forbore further contention and ceased to make any show of opposition. They wisely determined to await the result, apprehensively yet hopefully. The long-continued and somewhat embittered rival-

ries between the two great parties in the denomination rapidly subsided and were gradually extinguished. A more hopeful spirit took possession of both the ministry and the people, and a new impulse was given to the work of evangelization It was manifestly a mighty and far-pervading outpouring of the Holy Spirit, that had so wonderfully pacified and harmonized these hitherto contending and alienated parties, now made one in the Lord.

The event was justly regarded as "unparalleled in the ecclesiastical history of this country, and almost of the world." In grateful recognition of the divine interposition, and in perpetual commemoration of the blessed issue, it was determined by the General Assembly of 1870 to call upon the Church "to make a special offering to the treasury of the Lord of five millions of dollars," previous to the meeting of the next Assembly, as a *Memorial fund.* So freely and so nobly did the people respond that the sum contributed far exceeded what was contemplated, amounting, when the accounts were finally closed, August 1, 1871, to $7,833,983.85 —a grand total of *nearly eight millions of dollars.* This vast sum was appropriated largely to the building and repairing of church-edifices, the extin-

guishment of church debts, and the endowment of existing educational institutions, imparting new life and energy to the whole Church in its great work of giving the gospel to the perishing millions at home and abroad.

It was to be expected that a Church thus compacted and rejuvenated would be pre-eminently a progressive Church, and the expectation has been fulfilled. Its progress has been marked and gratifying. The membership has advanced from a total of 446,561, in 1870, to 592,128, in 1882, and is at this moment not less in number than 600,000, being an average annual increase of 12,130 communicants, notwithstanding the large depletions occasioned by death and removals to other denominations. The number of church organizations has increased to 5744, an advance of 1218 churches since 1870, and of more than 100 annually. During the year ending in May, 1882, the last one reported, 182 new churches had been organized—one for every two days of the year. The ministerial force has increased from 4238, in 1870, to 5143, in 1882, more than 75 annually. During the same period the Sunday-school membership has risen from 448,857 to 654,051. The number of conversions, indicated by additions on

examination or by confession, has been 386,608—an annual average of 32,217. The highest number reached in any one year was 48,240; the lowest number, 25,344.

The growth of the Church has been most marked in the region beyond the Mississippi River. In Kansas alone the membership has increased from 2953 to 12,696—more than fourfold; the churches, from 93 to 313; and the ministry, from 79 to 198. Four new Synods have been created in the great West—the territory extending from Texas on the south-east to Washington Territory and Alaska on the north-west.

A marked advance is to be noted also in the aggregate of pecuniary contributions. While nearly half a million of dollars is reported as having been added to the payment of congregational expenses the past year, the contributions to the cause of benevolence have exceeded those of 1870 by $366,801—an increase of eighteen per cent. The advance in missionary contributions is more than thirty-seven per cent.

It should be borne in mind that previous to the reunion the New School churches had distinctively favored the policy of co-operative benevolence, and had made common cause with the Congregational

churches in patronizing the American Home Missionary Society and the American Board of Foreign Missions. Their preference of co-operation with churches and people of sister-denominations in the aggressive work of the Church of Christ, and their opposition or indifference to denominational work by the Boards of the Presbyterian Church, had done much, previous to the disruption, to widen the breach between them and their Old School brethren.

The successful inauguration by a New School Assembly, some thirty years since, of a Church Erection Fund, to be used by a board of trustees, on a purely denominational basis, for the erection of church-edifices, had led measurably to a reconsideration of their pronounced policy in this respect. Driven by the force of circumstances, as they sincerely believed, to withdraw themselves from connection with the American Home Missionary Society, and to organize in May, 1861, a permanent committee for the prosecution of the whole work of home missions within their bounds, they found themselves occupying, in spite of earlier convictions and administrations, a position not much unlike that maintained by their Old School brethren. This revolutionary process had consid-

erably aided in clearing the way to a reunion, and was completed when, in 1870, they parted company with their Congregational brethren in the work of foreign, as they had years before in that of home, missions, and united with their former Old School brethren in the hearty support of the Boards of the Church as reconstructed by the Assembly.

All differences of opinion and of operation in respect to benevolent organizations very soon after the reunion quietly disappeared. It has come to be regarded as a matter of loyalty, for the Church, both ministers and people, to sustain its regularly constituted boards, its own appointed agencies. This is now deemed to be the true method of co-operative benevolence, the most harmonious and the most effective.

The Boards, both of Home and Foreign Missions, have ever since prosecuted their work with constantly-increasing energy and success. The Home Board last year employed 1303 missionaries, who together gave 1270 years to the work. The Foreign Board employed not less than 1200 American and native laborers in their several missions throughout the world, at an expense of $591,639.88. The Board of Publication has been in possession of greatly enlarged premises, highly valuable, in an

admirable location, on Chestnut Street, in Philadelphia, has greatly extended the sphere of its operations, and is circulating yearly, in the form of books, tracts and periodicals, a largely increased amount of religious literature, much of which is characteristically Presbyterian in polity, and all of it in doctrine. The Board of Church Erection has never been more successful in its appropriate work of furnishing feeble churches—especially in the new settlements—with the means of completing comfortable houses of worship free from debt.

Not to speak in detail of the other boards as appliances of the Church in its aggressive work, in the education of the ministry, the work for the freedmen and in the relief of the disabled of the ministry, it is safe to say that during the past twelve years the Presbyterian Church has been consolidating its resources, perfecting its instrumentalities and enlarging its operations for the prosecution of church work in general, and denominational work in particular, so steadily and effectively, that it never was so thoroughly furnished for, and so steadily bent upon, a forward movement all along the line as at the present moment. The outlook was never better—never as

good. The field of labor is ever widening, doors of usefulness are opening in all directions, and the call for men and means is waxing louder and louder. The last Assembly consequently urged upon the churches to give an additional hundred thousand dollars to each of the missionary Boards of the Church.

This presentation would be incomplete without a careful statement of the doctrinal position and prospects of this numerous family of Christian people. In their expansion by reunion, and their subsequent consolidation and growth, have they maintained their historic reputation for soundness in the faith and for a strict observance of the apostolic rules of holy living?

The two parties in the Church, after protracted and careful inquiry and an intelligent consideration of the points of alleged variance, came together as Christian brethren, as true Presbyterians in doctrine and polity, occupying the same platform, adhering to the essentials of "the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures" and embodied in the confession and catechisms of the Church, and tacitly, if not expressly, agreeing to respect each other's diversities of interpretation outside of that system. It was a grand spectacle, with-

out parallel in historic Christianity—a candid, generous and trustful agreement to bury the prejudices of the past, to look kindly upon one another in their disagreements, and to unite heart, soul and voice under the broad banner of a common Calvinistic faith.

The compact has been faithfully kept to this day. The old controversies have been laid to rest —have died a natural death. Every attempt, by whomsoever made, friends or foes, to bring them to life again has been met with the most determined negative. Brethren, of whatever school in the past, are no longer regarded as offenders for an indiscreet word or an ill-timed discussion or curious speculation, so long as the essential system of doctrine is honestly maintained.

The two parties have been brought together in the same Sessions, Presbyteries, Synods and Assemblies. They have taken one another by the hand, looked one another in the eyes, bowed together in prayer, preached in the same pulpits, taken counsel together, labored in Christian work together, learned to love one another as never before, and gladly now mingle in fellowship as brethren in Christ. In all that distinctively constitutes Christian faith and character, they have

found scarcely the least diversity; and so they have formed the habit of magnifying the things in which they agree and minimizing those in which they differ. They have learned to comply with the apostolic precept to receive "him that is weak in the faith," if in the faith, "but not to doubtful disputations."

The old lines of demarkation, drawn and intensified long before the rupture, have virtually been blotted out. The most careful observer cannot trace them. Thirteen General Assemblies, representing every section of the Church, and by a continually changing constituency embodying every shade of thought, opinion and sentiment in the whole denomination, have come together since the union. Their sessions have continued seldom less than twelve days. The utmost latitude of discussion has prevailed. All kinds of topics pertaining to the interests of the denomination and of the Church at large have been presented, and every opportunity given for an expression of opinion, individually and collectively. But no one of these Assemblies has divided on the old party lines. Such a thing is now simply impossible. Even the alternation in choosing moderators was broken up by the last Assembly. Differences of interpretation

prevail far less than formerly, but are never put forth as party watchwords. The whole Church would frown upon any such attempt. The Presbyterian Church never was so homogeneous in doctrine as now.

There is at present no controversy within the Church in respect to any of the fundamental doctrines or cognate questions. The hypothesis of a possible probation after death for certain classes of the human family has thus far received no countenance among us. It finds no place in the teachings of the pulpit. No Presbytery would deem as properly qualified to be an ambassador of Christ a candidate for the ministry, who should avow his belief in such a speculation. If the speculation is anywhere entertained among us, it is only in rare cases and as a mere conjecture. No fears prevail that views so directly at variance with the Confession and Catechisms of the Church, as well as with the teachings of our Lord and his apostles, can obtain a foothold in the Church.

The theological seminaries of the denomination, with perhaps a single exception (that of Danville, in Kentucky, which has for the present suspended its work), were never blessed with greater prosperity. They are for the most part well endowed,

and have, each of them, an admirable corps of professors of unimpeachable soundness in the faith. The Church is thoroughly furnished with the requisite appliances for the best possible instruction of its future ministry. Not the slightest apprehension need be entertained as to the maintenance by the Presbyterian Church of the future of that system of doctrine commonly called Calvinistic.

At the same time let it be noted that, while thus earnestly contending "for the faith once delivered to the saints," in accordance with its own formulas of doctrine and discipline, this community of Christians extends the hand of fellowship to all, of every name, who hold the cardinal truths of the gospel, and who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity and in truth. Delegates from other evangelical denominations are welcomed to the sittings of the General Assembly, and the lower judicatories uniformly invite correspondents from these bodies to sit with them and participate in their deliberations. While seeking to prosecute their own work with all diligence, they are ever ready to co-operate with other churches in giving the Bible to the world, and in the widest possible efforts for the advancement of the kingdom of Christ on earth.

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